

Opening Statement By Chairman Vernon J. Ehlers

Good morning ladies and gentleman. The Committee on House Administration will come to order. Today's hearing is on the IT Assessment initiative, which outlines a ten-year vision for the future use of technology in the House of Representatives. This hearing will focus on several key business decisions, called "To-Be" Visions, which the House needs to agree upon before implementing a strategic technology plan. We will talk about specific technologies to implement these "To-Be" visions at a future hearing.

The issue of using technology to improve House operations is not a new one. In 1995, as chairman of the House Computer and Information Services Working Group, I championed the Cyber Congress plan, commonly referred to as the Boonstra report. As part of that effort, we created a new, standardized e-mail platform that would replace the eleven separate e-mail systems used across the House. As challenging a task as it was, today we reap the benefits of being on a common e-mail platform, as well as other uniform software choices, that allows for enhanced collaboration and improved technical support.

It is my hope that the findings we will examine today and over the next few weeks may reveal a similar opportunity to invest in the future of the House through the use of technology.

On our first panel today, we have Kathy Goldschmidt of the Congressional Management Foundation and Larry Bradley from Gartner Consulting, who will discuss the results of the study. These findings are the product of extensive research with key stakeholders, including detailed interviews of 128 Members, managers, and staff throughout the House and the legislative branch. The interviews that the CMF and Gartner team conducted were designed to capture the challenges that House staff face each day, the impact of technology on their work, and what improvements we can make in our systems and processes to help House employees do their jobs better.

As any researcher will tell you, any theory, no matter how well-formed, must be tempered with the challenges and complications of real-life situations in order to paint an accurate picture of their true effect. To provide this additional, practical context, our second panel will consist of several experts on the administration and operations of the House:

Jim Cornell, House Inspector General, will discuss the potential impact of a failure to embrace technology on the future operations of the House;

Bill Livingood, the House Sergeant at Arms, will discuss the convergence of IT security and physical security and the implications for IT planning and decision making.;

Karen Haas, Clerk of the House, will describe previous efforts to implement new technology into existing processes within the Legislative process and the Office of the Clerk;

Pope Barrow, House Legislative Counsel, will provide insight into the challenges of drafting legislative language and how technology could improve that process;

And, finally Jay Eagen, Chief Administrative Officer of the House, will provide a historical perspective on technology in the House, our current state, and where we go from here.

I would also like to announce that at the conclusion of this hearing, the Committee will make available all of the IT Assessment research and recommendations on an internal House website: <http://IT.House.gov>. Furthermore, we are soliciting general comments from any Member of Congress or House staff member on the contents of this study. All may submit your comments at the above mentioned website. The comment period will run through January, 2007, in order to provide the 110th Congress freshmen class an opportunity to participate.

I thank all of our witnesses for their presence here today, and I look forward to receiving their testimony.